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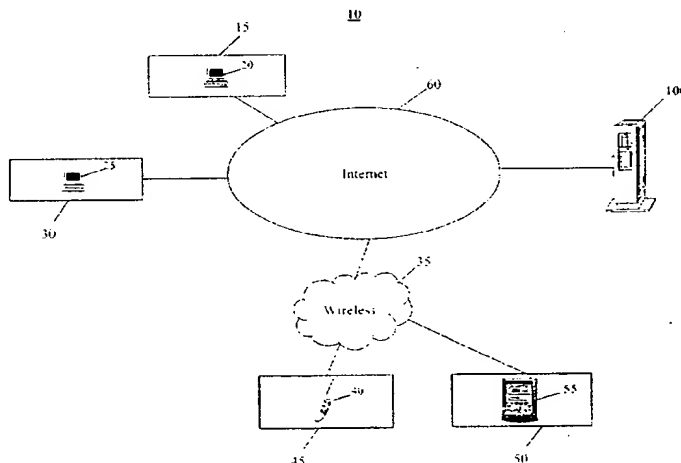
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(54) Title: VIRTUAL DIRECTORY



(57) Abstract: A method, system and a apparatus for providing a virtual directory to facilitate a quick, direct search for a web site on the Internet (60). A user (15) is provided with an extensive number of first level search categories. By clicking on a first level search category, the user (15) is linked to a plurality of corresponding second level search categories which are pre-selected by a service provider. By clicking on a second level search category, the user (15) is linked to a plurality of corresponding third level search categories, which are also pre-selected by the service provider. The third level search categories are preferably URLs corresponding to the search. The user (15) can click on any one of the URLs to access a web site. A button (55) is provided on a bar of the web site by which a user can return to one of the first or second level search categories directly from the current web page bypassing all the intermediate web pages the user reviewed. The virtual directory also provides a search engine directory whereby a user can switch from one search engine to another in order to complete a search without having to retype a search category.

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CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims priority from provisional United States Patent Application Serial No. 60/249515 entitled VIRTUAL DIRECTORY filed on November 17, 2000, the entirety of which is incorporated by reference herein.

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FIELD

A method, system and apparatus for providing a virtual directory for the world wide web ("Internet") and, more specifically, a method, system and apparatus for providing an improved virtual directory searching system for consumer to business or business to business electronic commerce.

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BACKGROUND

In recent years, the Internet has been transformed from a virtual unknown, used by only a select group of college professors and government researchers, to a virtual universe with over 120 million people visiting regularly from the U.S. alone. The number of users will continue to grow rapidly as home computers become more affordable and high speed Internet access becomes more available. As the number of users increase, so will the number of web sites. Jupiter Communication reported approximately 2 billion web pages at the beginning of 2000 and projects the number to exceed 16 billion within 4 years. The good news is that never before have businesses and consumers had such tremendous access to information. The bad news is that finding the right information among the billions of web sites has become much more difficult and time consuming. The plethora of information now available on the Internet can make even a simple search complicated.

Multiple search engines and portal directories such as *yahoo.com*, *altavista.com* or *google.com*, have come on-line in recent years to assist Internet users in finding web sites. The machine assembled search engines available today are very expansive and often retrieve a tremendous amount of information. They retrieve pages on the web by matching words in the pages from broad databases of text available on the world wide web. A "crawler" enters a web site and thoroughly indexes the page contents. The frequencies and proximity of significant words are tallied and form the basis of the order of display in search results from the engine. A simple search on one of these

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engines can produce over hundreds, if not, thousands of results. Often the results are irrelevant and a waste of time. Search engines generally display only about 10 items of the entire results per page. This is commonly referred to as "first page results". Most often several sites listed among the first page results are not even relevant to the topic entered. Moreover, it is not uncommon for the same site to be listed multiple times on the same page, or for a site to contain offensive material. This can be a frustrating experience for the typical user.

What differentiates a search engine from a directory is simple human intervention. Directories, whether they are organized by subject categories or databases, are searchable, browsable and assembled by humans. Available directories have the same characteristics: a search bar to type in a desired topic and a limited number of predetermined categories, usually on the order of 10 to 15, such as "sports", "shopping" or "entertainment" to browse within. In addition, most directories have very busy web pages. Usually surrounding the search bar and categories are flashing news headlines, stock quotes, horoscopes, weather and the ever present banner advertisements.

There are several stumbling blocks to a successful search using current directories. The obvious: how to fit the contents of the Internet into 10 to 15 categories. Browsing the categories often becomes a time consuming guessing game. Every web site on every topic contained within the directory is grouped into one of the 10 to 15 categories. The user commonly must guess which broad category applies to the topic of the search. An incorrect guess will cause the user to click on a pointing device, such as a mouse, numerous times more than necessary; or, even if the user guesses correctly, the user must click many times to further narrow the broad category. After the passage of a significant amount of time, it is not uncommon that a user may be twelve pages deep into a site and nowhere near the desired topic. Companies whose sites are listed in current directories must rely on the patience and intuition of web users if their sites are to be found.

The type and search format of existing search engines and directories are also cumbersome and do not lend easily to new wireless technology. Existing search engines and directories lack speed and it is often difficult to type in the text. Many of the existing directories are also "sticky." Such directories keep the user within the site, opening as many pages as possible, for as long as possible. There is a need for an

Internet directory which provides easier access through scrolling and clicking through an extensive list of topics such that a user leaves the directory and reaches their destination as quickly as possible. There is also a need for a directory with stream-lined text to facilitate downloading.

5 Still another disadvantage of current search engines/portal directories arises when a user cannot complete a successful search in one search engine/portal directory and seeks to resume the search in another search engine/portal directory. Exiting one sticky directory can be complicated enough, while accessing another directory to resume a search can be even more time consuming. There is a need for an
10 Internet search engine directory that facilitates transition from one search engine/portal directory to another in order to complete a search.

SUMMARY

The method, system and apparatus provides a virtual directory in which a simple interface guides a user to a desired web site in a limited number of clicks,
15 preferably four or less, to obtain quick, direct results without the need for typing in any text.

In accordance with one embodiment, upon login, a simple first interface/screen showing all the available first level categories in one page is displayed to a user. Preferably, the first level categories are organized in alphabetical order for the
20 convenience of the user. The available categories on the screen are pre-selected and up-loaded to the screen by a directory service provider. Each first level category is linked to a plurality of corresponding second level sub-categories. The plurality of second level sub-categories, also are pre-selected and up-loaded by the service provider, and each plurality of second level sub-categories is branched from a corresponding first level
25 category. Each second level sub-category is linked to a plurality of corresponding third level sub-categories. The plurality of third level sub-categories, also are pre-selected and up-loaded by the service provider and each plurality of third level sub-categories is branched from a second level sub-category. While the number of link levels for sub-categories may vary depending on a search category, the third level of linking (third level
30 sub-category) is preferable for most Internet searches.

A user browses the first level categories and points and clicks on the corresponding word (*i.e.*, a category) on the screen. Alternatively, if the user does not

find an appropriate category by scrolling up and down the page where the categories are listed, or the user does not want to scroll up and down the page, the user may preferably point and click on one of the letters of the alphabet shown on the screen along with the first level categories. The selected letter corresponds to the search category the user
5 has in mind. Each letter of the alphabet is linked to a group of first level search categories pre-selected and up-loaded by a directory service provider. Preferably, the first letter of each category in the group corresponds to the letter of the alphabet selected. If the virtual directory does not have a category corresponding to the user's search, the user may be encouraged to send an e-mail to the service provider requesting
10 that the missing category be included in the directory.

In response to the first click, a second screen is displayed showing a plurality of corresponding second level sub-categories. The user selects a second level sub-category by pointing and clicking on the corresponding word (*i.e.*, a category) on the screen.

15 In response to the second click, the user is presented with a third screen which shows a plurality of corresponding third level sub-categories. If the third link level is sufficient for the search, the third level sub-categories comprise a plurality of URLs (Universal Resource Locators) linked to real web sites relating to the selected second level sub-category. The user selects one of the URLs by pointing and clicking on the
20 corresponding URL on the screen. In response to the third click, the user has now logged onto a web site and can now browse the web site to access the information needed.

In another embodiment, while the user is browsing the web site, the user is provided with a link in any form, preferably a bar, button or icon, by which the user can
25 return to one of the previous sub-categories directly with a single click bypassing all the intermediate web pages the user reviewed in the web site.

In still another embodiment, a first interface displays at least 1,000 first level search categories in a single web page, wherein each of the first level search categories is configured such that a user can point and click on any category and link to a
30 plurality of second level search categories. The user can browse the first level search categories using a scroll bar or alternatively by clicking on the letter of the alphabet corresponding to the search category of interest. After receiving the first click, a second

interface is displayed which shows no more than 30 second level search categories corresponding to one of the first level search categories selected by the user, wherein each of the second level search categories is configured such that a user can point and click on any category and link to a plurality of third level search categories. After
5 receiving the second click, a third interface is displayed to the user showing no more than 30 third level search categories corresponding to one of the second level search categories selected by the user. Each third level search category comprises a URL, such that upon pointing and clicking on a URL (the third click), a user is linked to an Internet web site.

10 In yet another embodiment, the virtual directory provides a search engine directory facilitating transition from one search engine to another. A user browsing the point and click directory can access the search engine directory at any time by clicking on a search button. At least one interface is displayed comprising a plurality of search engine categories, wherein search engine categories are configured so that a user can
15 point and click on a category and link directly to a search engine web site. A user types in a search topic in a search field and clicks on a search engine category to link to a search engine web site. If the user is not satisfied with the results of the search in the search engine web site, the user can return directly to the search engine directory by clicking on a return button or icon. Without retyping the search topic, the user can click
20 on another search engine category and link directly to another search engine web site to resume the search.

It is not intended that the method, system and apparatus for providing a virtual directory be summarized here in its entirety. Rather, further features, aspects and advantages of the virtual directory are set forth in or are apparent from the following brief
25 description, detailed description, drawings and claims which follow.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Further aspects of the method, system and apparatus for providing a virtual directory will be more readily appreciated upon review of the detailed description set forth below when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, of which:

30 FIG. 1 is a network schematic of an embodiment of a virtual directory system 10;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of an embodiment of a virtual directory host

server 100;

FIG. 3 is a flow chart 200 illustrating an embodiment of the process by which the virtual directory system guides a user to an Internet web site;

FIG. 4 is an embodiment of a first interface 300 displaying first level search categories corresponding to the letter "A" and also displaying the alphabet on the left margin of the screen and a scroll bar on the right margin of the screen;

FIG. 5 is an embodiment of a first interface 400 displaying first level search categories corresponding to the letter "B" positioned on the screen by using the scroll bar;

FIG. 6 is an embodiment a second interface 500 displaying second level search categories;

FIG. 7 is an embodiment of a third interface 600 displaying third level search categories; and

FIG. 8 is an embodiment of the home page 700 of a selected web site, "Weber", with a return bar, including a return button and a hide button.

FIG. 9 is an embodiment of a search engine directory 800 displaying a plurality of search engine categories listed in alphabetical order and also displaying a search button at the top right portion of the screen, the alphabet on the left margin of the screen and a text field above the search engine list.

FIG. 10 is an embodiment of a search engine directory 900 with a search topic "Mononucleosis" typed in the text field.

FIG. 11 is an embodiment of a web page 1000 of a selected search engine, "Google", with a return bar, including a return button and a hide button.

It will be understood that the foregoing brief description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory of the method, system and apparatus for providing a virtual directory, but are not intended to be restrictive thereof or limiting of the advantages which can be achieved by the virtual directory. Thus, the accompanying drawings, referred to herein and constituting a part hereof, illustrate embodiments of the virtual directory and, together with the detailed description, serve to explain the principles of the virtual directory.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 is a network schematic of an embodiment of a virtual directory

system ("VDS") 10. VDS 10 is configured so that a user searching for a particular web site can be guided to the web site using a web browser in a limited number of clicks, preferably four or less, without the need for typing in any text. VDS 10 is suitable for the Internet, and more preferably for consumer to business or business to business electronic commerce. VDS 10 includes virtual directory host server 100 which is connected to Internet 60 through an Internet service provider (ISP). End users 15, 30, 45 and 50 are connected to Internet 60 through any type of computing device such as personal computers 20 and 25, a workstation, a network terminal, or via wireless communications 35 using any form of wireless or hand-held remote device, such as wireless telephone 40 or palm pilot 55, that can accomplish two-way electronic communication over the network.

Turning now to FIG. 2, illustrated therein are exemplary components of a computer device, such as virtual directory host server 100. Any of user remote devices 20, 25, 40 or 55 may share a similar configuration. The primary component of virtual directory host server 100 is processor 110, which may be any commonly available microprocessor. Processor 110 may be operatively connected to further exemplary components, such as RAM/ROM 120, clock 130, input/output device(s) 140, and memory 150 which, in turn, stores one or more computer programs 160.

Processor 110 operates in conjunction with random access memory and read-only memory. The random-access memory (RAM) portion of RAM/ROM 120 may be a suitable number of Single In-Line Memory Module (SIMM) chips having a storage capacity (typically measured in kilobytes or megabytes) sufficient to store and transfer, *inter alia*, processing instructions utilized by processor 110 which may be received from application programs 160. The read-only memory (ROM) portion of RAM/ROM 120 may be any permanent non-rewritable memory medium capable of storing and transferring, *inter alia*, processing instructions performed by processor 110 during a start-up routine of virtual directory host server 100.

Clock 130 may be an on-board component of processor 110 which dictates a clock speed (typically measured in MHz) at which processor 110 performs and synchronizes, *inter alia*, communication between the internal components of virtual directory host server 100.

Input/output device(s) 140 may be one or more known devices used for

receiving operator inputs, network data, and the like and transmitting outputs resulting therefrom. Accordingly, exemplary input devices may include a keyboard, a mouse, a voice recognition unit and the like for receiving operator inputs. Output devices may include any known devices used to present data to an operator of virtual directory host server 100 or to transmit data over computer network 10 to a remote user. Accordingly, suitable output devices may include a display, a printer and a voice synthesizer connected to a speaker.

Other input/output device(s) 140 may include a telephonic or network connection device, such as a telephone modem, a cable modem, a T-1 connection, a digital subscriber line or a network card, for communicating data to and from other computer devices over computer network 10, such as remote devices 20, 25, 40 and 55. Input/output device(s) 140 can have capacity to handle high bandwidth traffic in order to accommodate communications with a large number of users.

Memory 150 may be an internal or external large capacity device for storing computer processing instructions, computer-readable data, and the like. The storage capacity of memory 150 is typically measured in megabytes or gigabytes. Accordingly, memory 150 may be one or more of the following: a floppy disk in conjunction with a floppy disk drive, a hard disk drive, a CD-ROM disk and reader/writer, a DVD disk and reader/writer, a ZIP disk and a ZIP drive, and/or any other computer readable medium that may be encoded with processing instructions in a read-only or read-write format. Further functions of and available devices for memory 150 will be apparent.

Memory 150 may store, *inter alia*, a plurality of programs 160 which may be any one or more of an operating system and one or more application programs, such as a directory service provider program. Programs 160 may include processing instructions for accomplishing a virtual directory system as described herein.

Virtual directory host server 100 can be configured to include any number of websites in memory 150 as well as any number of search categories. For example, the virtual directory can coordinate as many as 500,000 sites into 1,400 categories. Virtual directory host server 100 can also be configured to list only the top web sites and to perform a "dead URL" search to ensure that the sites listed are active, and can be continually updated with the most current and popular sites for each category.

The virtual directory process may begin after a user at remote device 20, 25, 40 or 55 selects the URL of virtual directory host server 100. The URL for virtual directory host server 100 may be entered into the URL entry field of the browser residing on the user's remote device. An exemplary sign-in window may then be presented on the display screen of the user's device including a sign-in field requiring, for example, a user name or other unique identifier. Upon entering the field information, the user may transmit such information to virtual directory host server 100 with a pointing and clicking device, such as a mouse. Alternatively, the home page of the virtual directory site may display the first interface of first level search categories.

10 In accordance with an embodiment, upon visiting the virtual directory host server 100 site, a first interface/screen displaying all the available first level categories in one page is presented to a user. Preferably, the first level categories can be at least 1000 items organized in, e.g., alphabetical order, for the convenience of the user. The available categories on the screen are pre-selected and up-loaded to the screen by a directory service provider. Each first level category is linked to a plurality of corresponding second level search categories. Preferably, the second level search categories are no more than 30 items branched from a corresponding first level category. The second level search categories are pre-selected and up-loaded by the service provider as the second level search categories. Each second level search category is linked to a plurality of corresponding third level search categories. Preferably, the third level search categories are no more than 30 items branched from a second level search category. The third level search categories are also pre-selected and up-loaded by the service provider as the third level search categories. While the number of link levels for search categories may vary depending on a search category, the third level of linking (third level search category) is preferable for most Internet searches.

25 The virtual directory is preferably configured to use hyperlinks. Simple underlining and or highlighted words are preferably employed to take a user to a desired destination when clicked.

30 A user selects one of the first level categories by pointing and clicking on the corresponding word (*i.e.*, a category) on the screen. Alternatively, if the user does not find an appropriate category by first scrolling up and down the page where the categories are listed, or the user does not want to scroll up and down the page, the user

may preferably click on one of the letters of the alphabet shown on a portion of the screen along with the first level categories. The selected letter corresponds to a search category the user has in mind. Each letter of the alphabet is linked to a group of first level search categories pre-selected and up-loaded by a directory service provider.

- 5 Preferably, the first letter of each category in the group corresponds to the letter of the alphabet selected. If the virtual directory does not have a category corresponding to the user's search, the user may be encouraged to send an e-mail to the service provider requesting that the missing category be included in the directory.

10 In response to the first click, the user is presented with a second screen which displays a plurality of corresponding second level search categories. The user selects a second level search category by pointing and clicking on the corresponding word (*i.e.*, a category) on the screen.

15 In response to the second click, the user is presented with a third screen which displays a plurality of corresponding third level search categories. If the third link level is sufficient for the search, the third level search categories comprise a plurality of URLs linked to web sites corresponding to the selected second level search category. The user selects one of the URLs by pointing and clicking on a URL on the screen.

20 The user has now logged onto a web site. The user can now browse the web site to access the information needed. While the user is in the web site, the user is provided with a link presented on the display screen in any form, preferably a bar, button or icon, by which the user can return to the virtual directory site directly with one click bypassing all the intermediate web pages the user reviewed in the web site.

25 The virtual directory system is preferably navigated using a point and click device, such as mouse. In the preferred embodiment, a user need only click and or scroll to reach a destination and does not have to type any text relating to a search. The directory is particularly useful for wireless and hand-held devices where typing in text can be cumbersome. The directory provides quick, direct results by simply requiring a user to click and or scroll to reach a desired web site. Preferably, the user reaches their destination in four clicks or less. The directory can be utilized for any search in a
30 consumer-to-business e-commerce environment, business-to-business e-commerce environment or in any search undertaken on the Internet.

The virtual directory is now described in further detail referring to flow

chart FIG. 3 in connection with FIGS. 4 to 8. The virtual directory system starts 205 when, in step 210 of FIG. 3, virtual directory host server 100 displays to a user a first interface of first level search categories.

FIG. 4 is an example of a first interface screen 300 presented to a user
5 upon visiting the web site of virtual directory host server 100. Header portion 310 of first interface 300 shows a name of a service provider "WhereTheHeckIsIt?com" of virtual directory host server 100. Main content portion 320 of first interface 300 shows all the available first level search categories in one page. The first level categories are organized in alphabetical order for convenience of the user. While the initial screen of
10 first interface 300 shows only a portion of the first level categories starting with the letter "A" and the first line of the first level categories starting with the letter "B", the page is configured to scroll up and down by scroll bar 330 to view the rest of the categories.

The left portion 340 of first interface 300 sets forth the alphabet, *i.e.*, letters A-Z. Each letter of the alphabet is configured to link to a corresponding group of
15 first level categories. Instead of clicking on scroll bar 330 to scroll up and down to find a particular category, a user may click on an alphabet letter on portion 340 to directly go to a group of first level search categories corresponding to the clicked alphabet letter. Using the alphabet, the virtual directory can allow users twenty-six options A through Z. The user chooses the letter that best fits the search. This intuitive step assists the user
20 to enter the directory at the correct point. Portion 340 of first interface 300 remains fixed on the page if a user chooses to scroll up and down the page using scroll bar 330.

First interface 300 usually shows a plurality of search categories, *i.e.*, preferably at least 1,000 search categories, enabling the user to select a search item as accurately as possible from the beginning of the search. The available categories on the
25 screen are pre-selected and up-loaded by the directory service provider. A user may also participate in selecting or adding to the search categories. For example, if the virtual directory does not have a category corresponding to a user's search category, the user may be prompted to send an e-mail to the service provider requesting that the missing category be included. The number and type of categories may be varied and selected
30 based on a variety of information, such as targeted users.

By way of example, a user may want to search the Internet for the types of special features offered by various manufacturers of "barbecue grills." As shown in FIG.

5, the user can search for the category "barbecue" by scrolling down main content portion 420 displaying first level search categories arranged in alphabetical order. By pointing and clicking on scroll bar 430 (the "first click"), the user can scroll to the group of first level search categories 420 beginning with the letter "B", which includes the category "barbecue". Again, header portion 410 of first interface 400 shows a name of a service provider "WhereTheHeckIsIt?com" of virtual directory host server 100, and alphabet portion 440 appears in the left margin of second interface 400.

Alternatively, if the user does not find the appropriate first level category by scrolling up and down the page or the user prefers not to use the scroll bar, the user may point and simply click on the Alphabetical list shown on the first page. In this embodiment, the user is searching for the category "barbecue", so the user clicks on the letter "B" (the "first click") to arrive at the group of first level search categories 420 beginning with the letter "B" as shown in FIG. 5.

At step 215 of FIG. 3, the virtual directory host server receives a first click command from the user and displays a group of first level search categories to the user in step 220. At step 225, the virtual directory host server receives a second click command from the user, and recognizes that the user clicked on the search category "barbecue". At step 225, upon receiving the second click command, the virtual directory host server 100 displays to the user a second interface comprising a plurality of second level search categories in step 230. The second level search categories correspond to the selected first level search category and, preferably, there are no more than 30 second level categories in number. The second level search categories are pre-selected by the service provider as corresponding to the selected first level category. By selecting the categories, the search can be controlled and guided by the service provider. Each of the second level search categories is linked to a group of third level search categories.

FIG. 6 is an example of a second interface screen 500 comprising a plurality of second level search categories 520. Second interface 500 in this example includes header 510 indicating the name of service provider "WhereTheHeckIsIt?com" and alphabet portion 540 by which the user may directly access another group of first level search categories. Top portion 530 of main content portion 520 displays a first level search category, i.e., "Barbecue. . .", that was selected by the user resulting in the display of second interface 500. Main content portion 520 comprises a plurality of

categories corresponding to the first level search category "barbecue". In this example, the service provider selected eight second level search categories: "Accessories", "Custom Built", "BBQ Sauces", "General Information", "Manufacturers", "Recipes", "Restaurant Chains" and "Retailers". Again, the user may be prompted to suggest
 5 additional categories. The suggested categories may be added based upon the service provider's discretion.

In this embodiment, the user clicks on "Manufacturers". In step 235 of FIG. 3, virtual directory host server 100 receives a third click command. In step 240, upon receiving the third click command, virtual directory host server 100 displays to the
 10 user a third interface comprising a plurality of third level search categories. The third level search categories are preferably a list of URLs related to the selected second level search category. Preferably, the third level search categories comprise the top 10, 20 or 30 URLs corresponding to a particular search. The URLs are selected by the service provider as corresponding to the selected second level search category. By selecting the
 15 URLs, the search can be controlled and guided by the service provider, such that a user is directed to quality web sites corresponding to the search category. Each of the third level search categories is linked to an Internet web site.

FIG. 7 is an example of a third interface screen 600 comprising a plurality of third level search categories. Third interface 600 in this example includes header 610
 20 indicating the name of service provider "WhereTheHeckIsIt?com" and alphabet portion 640 by which the user may directly access another group of first level search categories. Top portion 630 of main content portion 620 displays a search path, i.e. "Barbecue o
 "Manufacturers. . . ", by which the user arrived at third interface 600. Main content portion 620 displays a list of barbecue manufacturers (URLs) relating to second level
 25 search category "Manufacturers" and the first level search category "Barbecue". The service provider in this example selected twenty (20) of the most popular barbecue manufacturers: "Big Green Egg", "Brinkman", "Broil King", "Broil-Mate", "Capt 'N Cook", "Coleman", "Cook On", "DCS", "Fiesta", "Flat Rock", "Lynx", "Masagrill", "Meco", "Turbo", "TSI", "Smoker", "Sunbeam", "Whales", "Weber" and "Wheel Tough Co.". The listed
 30 names of manufacturers are configured to point and click on to link to an Internet web site of a selected manufacturer.

Upon deciding to visit the web site of "Weber", for example, the user

points and clicks on the name "Weber" displayed in third interface 600. In step 245 of FIG. 3, virtual directory host server 100 receives a fourth click command corresponding to the selected third level search category of third interface 600. In step 250, upon receiving the third click command, virtual directory host server 100 links to the web site selected by the user and displays the home page of the web site. The user has now
 5 logged onto the web site of "Weber." The user can now browse the web site of Weber and retrieve information responsive to the search thereby ending the search or repeating the search process (Step 255 of FIG. 3) for a different barbecue manufacturer or search category.

10 FIG. 8 is an illustrative screen 700 of the home page of "Weber" 710. The lower portion of screen 700 comprises bar 720 including return button 730 captioned "Click Here to Return" to the service provider ("WhereTheHeckIsIt?com") and hide button 740 captioned "Click Here to Hide Bar". The clicks for both buttons are provided through a frame by the service provider for the virtual directory. Hide button 740 is configured to
 15 return the user back to the virtual directory, preferably to the first, second, third or any level of categories directly. Using the button, the user can return to the virtual directory with a single click regardless of how deep the user has browsed in a web site bypassing all of the intermediate web pages the user viewed in the web site. Hide button 740 is configured to hide bar 720, e.g., when a web page is printed so that it does not appear on
 20 the printed page. The return and hide buttons can be provided in any form.

The ability of the virtual directory to provide quick, direct results according to the foregoing embodiments is summarized below:

- Click 1 Click on the letter "B" for barbecue.
- Click 2 Next? Click on the word "Barbecue".
- Click 3 Next? Click on the sub-topic "Manufacturers".
- Click 4 Next? After just three clicks of the mouse, the user has arrived at a page full of links to barbecue manufacturers' web sites. The user is free to click on any link and browse back and fourth among the different companies.

As illustrated above, if a user wants to find out about barbecue

manufacturers, in four clicks, the user can have access to the top twenty, without distracting and irrelevant direction to unrelated web sites. By clicking on the selected manufacturer, the user can gain direct access to the manufacturer's web site and can move to another manufacturer in as little as two clicks.

5 The virtual directory does not simply direct a user to the search results. It can get a user back to the directory just as quickly and directly. The virtual directory avoids the limitations of prior art search engines and portal directories where a user could get lost many pages deep in an irrelevant web site and have difficulty getting back to the starting point of a search, or get trapped in a web site that refuses to let the user leave
10 until the user is essentially forced to type in a new URL number. The virtual directory removes these limitations by providing a link back to the virtual directory, in the form of a bar, icon, button or other mark, that can always be visible while the user browses the various web sites. In the case of the barbecue manufacturers, anytime the user wants to return to the directory listing the 20 manufacturers (no matter how many clicks deep the
15 user has gone in a web site), the user simply clicks on the return button once and is immediately taken back to the virtual directory.

 In another embodiment, the virtual directory can be utilized to facilitate transition from one search engine to another. For example, a user may not be able to find a search category corresponding to a search topic using the point and click directory
20 described above. In such an instance, the virtual directory enables a user to search for the particular search category in any number of search engines or portal directories without having to retype the search category. Furthermore, in the event a search cannot be completed in a particular search engine site, a user can directly return to the virtual directory from the search engine site so that the user can switch to another search
25 engine site just as quickly and directly until the search is completed.

 Referring to FIG. 9, interface screen 800 displays a plurality of search engine categories, *i.e.*, a search engine directory. Interface screen 800 includes header 810 indicating the name of service provider "WhereTheHeckIsIt?.com.", including search button or icon 820. Main content portion 830 includes a plurality of search engine
30 categories arranged in alphabetical order. The top portion of main content portion includes a search category "Search Engines. . ." 840 and text field 850 for typing in a search topic. Alphabet portion 860 appears on the left margin of interface screen 800.

In this embodiment, a user could not find the search topic "Mononucleosis" in the point and click virtual directory described above. The user accesses the search engine directory by clicking on search button 820 or by clicking on the search category "Search Engines" found in the virtual directory. The search category "Search Engines" can be found in the directory using a scroll bar and scrolling down the list of search categories or by clicking on the letter "S" on the alphabet portion -- the search category "Search Engines" is listed in the group of search categories corresponding to the letter "S".

In this embodiment, the search engine directory includes the following search engines categories (URLs) arranged in alphabetical order: "Alta Vista", "Ask Jeeves", "Direct Hit", "Excite", "Fast Search", "Go", "GoTo", "Google", "HotBot", "Looksmart", "Lycos", "MSN Search", "NBCi", "Netscape Search", "Northern Light", "DMOZ", "Raging Search", "RealNames", "WebCrawler" and "Yahoo". Any number of search engine categories arranged in any manner and in any number of interfaces (link levels) are suitable for the search engine directory. For example, search engine categories relating to the topic "medical" can be arranged such that a user (i) clicks on the letter "M" of alphabet portion, (ii) clicks on the topic "medical" among the group of search engine categories corresponding to the letter "M" and (iii) clicks on one of the search engine categories (URLs) corresponding to the search engine category "Medical".

Referring to FIG. 10, a user typed in the search topic "Mononucleosis" in text field 910 of interface screen 900. By clicking on any of search engine categories (URLs) 920, the user searches for the topic "Mononucleosis" in the selected search engine category (URL). In this embodiment, the user selects search engine category "Google" 930.

FIG. 11 displays an illustrative screen 1000 of a web page from the web directory Google. The page displays the results corresponding to search topic "Mononucleosis" 1010. The lower portion of screen 1000 comprises bar 1020 including return button 1030 captioned "Click Here to Return" to the service provider ("WhereTheHeckIsIt?com") and hide button 1040 captioned "Click Here To Hide Bar". The clicks for both buttons are provided through a frame by the service provider for the virtual directory. The "Click Here To Return" button is configured to return the user back to the virtual directory, preferably to the search engine directory. Using the button, the

user can return to the search engine directory in a single click regardless of how deep the user has browsed in a search engine site bypassing all of the intermediate web pages the user viewed in the web site. In this manner, if a user visiting the Google site cannot find the results for the search topic "Mononucleosis", the user can directly access the search engine directory by clicking on return button 1030 in order to switch to another search engine. The user simply clicks on another search engine category, *i.e.*, Yahoo, to search for the topic "Mononucleosis". The user does not have to retype the topic "Mononucleosis". Hide button 1040 is configured to hide bar 1020. The return and hide buttons can be provided in any form.

Although illustrative embodiments have been described herein in detail, it should be noted and understood that the descriptions have been provided for purposes of illustration only and that other variations both in form and detail can be made thereupon without departing from the spirit and scope of the method, system and apparatus for providing a virtual directory. The terms and expressions have been used as terms of description and not terms of limitation. There is no limitation to use the terms or expressions to exclude any equivalents of features shown and described or portions thereof and the virtual directory should be defined with the claims that follow.

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. A method for pointing and clicking through a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:

- (i) receiving a display of a first interface comprising,
 - at least 1,000 first level search categories arranged in alphabetical order in a single web page, wherein each of said first level search categories is configured for pointing and clicking to link to no more than 30 second level search categories,
 - alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said first level search categories, and
 - a scroll bar adjacent said first level search categories for navigating through said first level search categories;
- (ii) pointing and clicking on a first level search category;
- (iii) receiving a display of a second interface comprising a plurality of said second level search categories corresponding to said first level search category, wherein each of said second level search categories is configured for pointing and clicking to link to no more than 30 third level search categories;
- (iv) pointing and clicking on a second level search category;
- (v) receiving a display of a third interface comprising a plurality of said third level search categories corresponding to said second level search category, wherein each of said third level search categories is a uniform research locator configured for pointing and clicking to link to an internet web site;
- (vi) pointing and clicking on a third level search category; and
- (vii) receiving a display of a web page of said internet web site corresponding to said third level search category.

2. The method of Claim 1, further comprising:

- (i) pointing and clicking on an alphabet letter;
- (ii) receiving a display of a group of said first level search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and
- (iii) pointing and clicking on a first level search category from said group of said first level search categories.

3. The method of Claim 1, further comprising pointing and clicking on said scroll bar to locate a first level search category.

4. The method of Claim 1, wherein said second interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said second level search categories.

5. The method of Claim 1, wherein said first level search category is displayed in said second interface adjacent said second level search categories.

6. The method of Claim 1, wherein said third interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said third level search categories.

7. The method of Claim 1, wherein a search path is displayed in said third interface adjacent said third level search categories.

8. The method of Claim 1, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

9. The method of Claim 8, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

10. The method of Claim 9, further comprising pointing and clicking on said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory.

11. The method of Claim 8, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

12. The method of Claim 11, further comprising pointing and clicking on said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

13. The method of Claim 1, further comprising using a mouse to point and click through said virtual directory.

14. A method for pointing and clicking through a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:

- (i) receiving a display of a first interface comprising,
 - a plurality of first level search categories arranged in alphabetical order in a single web page, wherein each of said first level search categories is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one second level search category,
 - alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said first level search categories, and
 - a scroll bar adjacent said first level search categories for

navigating through said first level search categories;

- (ii) pointing and clicking on a first level search category;
- (iii) receiving a display of a second interface comprising at least one second level search category corresponding to said first level search category, wherein each second level search category is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one third level search category;
- (iv) pointing and clicking on a second level search category;
- (v) receiving a display of a third interface comprising at least one third level search category corresponding to said second level search category, wherein each third level search category is a uniform research locator configured for pointing and clicking to link to an internet web site;
- (vi) pointing and clicking on a third level search category; and
- (vii) receiving a display of a web page of said internet web site corresponding to said third level search category.

15. The method of Claim 14, further comprising:

- (i) pointing and clicking on an alphabet letter;
- (ii) receiving a display of a group of said first level search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and
- (iii) pointing and clicking on a first level search category from said group of said first level search categories.

16. The method of Claim 14, further comprising pointing and clicking on said scroll bar to locate a first level search category.

17. The method of Claim 14, wherein said second interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said second level search categories.

18. The method of Claim 14, wherein said first level search category is displayed in said second interface adjacent said second level search categories.

19. The method of Claim 14, wherein said third interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said third level search categories.

20. The method of Claim 14, wherein a search path is displayed in said third interface adjacent said third level search categories.

21. The method of Claim 14, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

22. The method of Claim 21, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

23. The method of Claim 22, further comprising pointing and clicking on said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory.

24. The method of Claim 21, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

25. The method of Claim 24, further comprising pointing and clicking on said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

26. The method of Claim 14, further comprising using a mouse to point and click through said virtual directory.

27. A method for pointing and clicking through a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:

- (i) receiving a display of a first interface comprising, a plurality of first level search categories arranged in alphabetical order in a single web page, wherein each of said first level search categories is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one second level search category, and alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said first level search categories;
- (ii) pointing and clicking on an alphabet letter;
- (iii) receiving a display of a group of first level search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter;
- (iv) pointing and clicking on a first level search category selected from said group of first level search categories;
- (v) receiving a display of a second interface comprising at least one second level search category corresponding to said first level search category, wherein each second level search category is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one third level search category;
- (vi) pointing and clicking on a second level search category;
- (vii) receiving a display of a third interface comprising at least one third level search category corresponding to said second level search category, wherein each third level search category is a uniform research locator

configured for pointing and clicking to link to an internet web site;

(viii) pointing and clicking on a third level search category; and

(ix) receiving a display of a web page of said internet web site corresponding to said third level search category.

28. The method of Claim 27, wherein said second interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said second level search categories.

29. The method of Claim 27, wherein said first level search category is displayed in said second interface adjacent said second level search categories.

30. The method of Claim 27, wherein said third interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said third level search categories.

31. The method of Claim 27, wherein a search path is displayed in said third interface adjacent said third level search categories.

32. The method of Claim 27, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

33. The method of Claim 32, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

34. The method of Claim 33, further comprising pointing and clicking on said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory.

35. The method of Claim 32, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

36. The method of Claim 35, further comprising pointing and clicking on said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

37. The method of Claim 27, further comprising using a mouse to point and click through said virtual directory.

38. A method for pointing and clicking through a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:

- (i) receiving a display of a first interface comprising,
 - a plurality of first level search categories arranged in a single web page, wherein each of said first level search categories is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one second level search category, and
 - a scroll bar adjacent said first level search categories for

- navigating through said first level search categories;
- (ii) pointing and clicking on said scroll bar to locate a first level search category;
 - (iii) pointing and clicking on said first level search category;
 - (iv) receiving a display of a second interface comprising at least one second level search category corresponding to said first level search category, wherein each second level search category is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one third level search category;
 - (v) pointing and clicking on a second level search category;
 - (vi) receiving a display of a third interface comprising at least one third level search category corresponding to said second level search category, wherein each third level search category is a uniform research locator configured for pointing and clicking to link to an internet web site;
 - (vii) pointing and clicking on a third level search category; and
 - (viii) receiving a display of a web page of said internet web site corresponding to said third level search category.

39. The method of Claim 38, wherein said first level search category is displayed in said second interface adjacent said second level search categories.

40. The method of Claim 38, wherein a search path is displayed in said third interface adjacent said third level search categories.

41. The method of Claim 38, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

42. The method of Claim 41, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

43. The method of Claim 42, further comprising pointing and clicking on said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory.

44. The method of Claim 41, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

45. The method of Claim 44, further comprising pointing and clicking on said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

46. The method of Claim 38, further comprising using a mouse to point and click through said virtual directory.

47. A method for pointing and clicking through a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:

- (i) receiving a display of a first interface comprising a plurality of first level search categories, wherein each of said first level search categories is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one second level search category;
- (ii) pointing and clicking on a first level search category;
- (iii) receiving a display of a second interface comprising at least one second level search category corresponding to said first level search category, wherein each second level search category is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one third level search category;
- (iv) pointing and clicking on a second level search category;
- (v) receiving a display of a third interface comprising at least one third level search category corresponding to said second level search category, wherein each third level search category is a uniform research locator configured for pointing and clicking to link to an internet web site;
- (vi) pointing and clicking on a third level search category; and
- (vii) receiving a display of a web page of said internet web site corresponding to said third level search category.

48. The method of Claim 47, wherein said first level search category is displayed in said second interface adjacent said second level search categories.

49. The method of Claim 47, wherein a search path is displayed in said third interface adjacent said third level search categories.

50. The method of Claim 47, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

51. The method of Claim 50, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

52. The method of Claim 51, further comprising pointing and clicking on said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory.

53. The method of Claim 50, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

54. The method of Claim 53, further comprising pointing and clicking

on said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

55. The method of Claim 47, further comprising using a mouse to point and click through said virtual directory.

56. A method for pointing and clicking through a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:

- (i) receiving a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search categories;
- (ii) pointing and clicking on a search category; and
- (iii) receiving a display of a web page of an internet web site corresponding to said search category.

57. The method of Claim 56, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search categories.

58. The method of Claim 57, further comprising:

- (i) pointing and clicking on an alphabet letter;
- (ii) receiving a display of a group of search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and
- (iii) pointing and clicking on a search category selected from said group of search categories.

59. The method of Claim 56, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search categories for navigating through said search categories.

60. The method of Claim 59, further comprising pointing and clicking on said scroll bar to locate a search category.

61. The method of Claim 56, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

62. The method of Claim 61, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

63. The method of Claim 62, further comprising pointing and clicking on said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory.

64. The method of Claim 61, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

65. The method of Claim 64, further comprising pointing and clicking

on said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

66. The method of Claim 56, further comprising using a mouse to point and click through said virtual directory.

67. A method for returning to a virtual directory, comprising:

- (i) receiving a display of a web page of an internet web site comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page; and
- (ii) pointing and clicking on said return bar to return to said virtual directory.

68. The method of Claim 67, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

69. The method of Claim 68, further comprising pointing and clicking on said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory.

70. The method of Claim 67, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

71. The method of Claim 70, further comprising pointing and clicking on said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

72. A method for providing a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:

- (i) transmitting a display of a first interface comprising,
 - at least 1,000 first level search categories arranged in alphabetical order in a single web page, wherein each of said first level search categories is configured for pointing and clicking to link to no more than 30 second level search categories,
 - alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said first level search categories, and
 - a scroll bar adjacent said first level search categories for navigating through said first level search categories;
- (ii) receiving a click command to select a first level search category;
- (iii) transmitting a display of a second interface comprising a plurality of said second level search categories corresponding to said first level search category, wherein each of said second level search categories is

configured for pointing and clicking to link to no more than 30 third level search categories;

(iv) receiving a click command to select a second level search category;

(v) transmitting a display of a third interface comprising a plurality of said third level search categories corresponding to said second level search category, wherein each of said third level search categories is a uniform research locator configured for pointing and clicking to link to an internet web site;

(vi) receiving a click command to select a third level search category; and

(vii) transmitting a display of a web page of said internet web site corresponding to said third level search category.

73. The method of Claim 72, further comprising:

(i) receiving a click command to select an alphabet letter;

(ii) transmitting a display of a group of said first level search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and

(iii) receiving a click command to select a first level search category from said group of said first level search categories.

74. The method of Claim 72, further comprising receiving a click command to control said scroll bar to locate a first level search category.

75. The method of Claim 72, wherein said second interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said second level search categories.

76. The method of Claim 72, wherein said first level search category is displayed in said second interface adjacent said second level search categories.

77. The method of Claim 72, wherein said third interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said third level search categories.

78. The method of Claim 72, wherein a search path is displayed in said third interface adjacent said third level search categories.

79. The method of Claim 72, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

80. The method of Claim 79, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

81. The method of Claim 80, further comprising:
- (i) receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory; and
 - (ii) transmitting a display of said third interface.
82. The method of Claim 79, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.
83. The method of Claim 82, further comprising:
- (i) receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and
 - (ii) transmitting a display of said web page without said return bar.
84. The method of Claim 72, further comprising receiving said click commands from a mouse.
85. A method for providing a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:
- (i) transmitting a display of a first interface comprising, a plurality of first level search categories arranged in alphabetical order in a single web page, wherein each of said first level search categories is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one second level search category, alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said first level search categories, and a scroll bar adjacent said first level search categories for navigating through said first level search categories;
 - (ii) receiving a click command to select a first level search category;
 - (iii) transmitting a display of a second interface comprising at least one second level search category corresponding to said first level search category, wherein each second level search category is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one third level search category;
 - (iv) receiving a click command to select a second level search category;

(v) transmitting a display of a third interface comprising at least one third level search category corresponding to said second level search category, wherein each third level search category is a uniform research locator configured for pointing and clicking to link to an internet web site;

(vi) receiving a click command to select a third level search category; and

(vii) transmitting a display of a web page of said internet web site corresponding to said third level search category.

86. The method of Claim 85, further comprising:

(i) receiving a click command to select an alphabet letter;

(ii) transmitting a display of a group of said first level search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and

(iii) receiving a click command to select a first level search category from said group of said first level search categories.

87. The method of Claim 85, further comprising receiving a click command to control said scroll bar to locate a first level search category.

88. The method of Claim 85, wherein said second interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said second level search categories.

89. The method of Claim 85, wherein said first level search category is displayed in said second interface adjacent said second level search categories.

90. The method of Claim 85, wherein said third interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said third level search categories.

91. The method of Claim 85, wherein a search path is displayed in said third interface adjacent said third level search categories.

92. The method of Claim 85, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

93. The method of Claim 92, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

94. The method of Claim 93, further comprising:

(i) receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory; and

(ii) transmitting a display of said third interface.

95. The method of Claim 92, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

96. The method of Claim 95, further comprising:

- (i) receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and
- (ii) transmitting a display of said web page without said return bar.

97. The method of Claim 85, further comprising receiving said click commands from a mouse.

98. A method for providing a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:

- (i) transmitting a display of a first interface comprising, a plurality of first level search categories arranged in alphabetical order in a single web page, wherein each of said first level search categories is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one second level search category, and alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said first level search categories;
- (ii) receiving a click command to select an alphabet letter;
- (iii) transmitting a display of a group of first level search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter;
- (iv) receiving a click command to select a first level search category selected from said group of first level search categories;
- (v) transmitting a display of a second interface comprising at least one second level search category corresponding to said first level search category, wherein each second level search category is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one third level search category;
- (vi) receiving a click command to select a second level search category;
- (vii) transmitting a display of a third interface comprising at least one third level search category corresponding to said second level search category, wherein each third level search category is a uniform research locator

configured for pointing and clicking to link to an internet web site;

(viii) receiving a click command to select a third level search category; and

(ix) transmitting a display of a web page of said internet web site corresponding to said third level search category.

99. The method of Claim 98, wherein said second interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said second level search categories.

100. The method of Claim 98, wherein said first level search category is displayed in said second interface adjacent said second level search categories.

101. The method of Claim 98, wherein said third interface comprises said alphabet letters arranged adjacent said third level search categories.

102. The method of Claim 98, wherein a search path is displayed in said third interface adjacent said third level search categories.

103. The method of Claim 98, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

104. The method of Claim 103, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

105. The method of Claim 104, further comprising:

(i) receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory; and

(ii) transmitting a display of said third interface.

106. The method of Claim 103, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

107. The method of Claim 106, further comprising:

(i) receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and

(ii) transmitting a display of said web page without said return bar.

108. The method of Claim 98, further comprising receiving said click commands from a mouse.

109. A method for providing a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:

- (i) transmitting a display of a first interface comprising,
a plurality of first level search categories arranged in a
single web page, wherein each of said first level search categories
is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one second
level search category, and
a scroll bar adjacent said first level search categories for
navigating through said first level search categories;
- (ii) receiving a click command to control said scroll bar to
locate a first level search category;
- (iii) receiving a click command to select said first level search
category;
- (iv) transmitting a display of a second interface comprising at
least one second level search category corresponding to said first level search
category, wherein each second level search category is configured for pointing
and clicking to link to at least one third level search category;
- (v) receiving a click command to select a second level search
category;
- (vi) transmitting a display of a third interface comprising at least
one third level search category corresponding to said second level search
category, wherein each third level search category is a uniform research locator
configured for pointing and clicking to link to an internet web site;
- (vii) receiving a click command to select a third level search
category; and
- (viii) transmitting a display of a web page of said internet web
site corresponding to said third level search category.

110. The method of Claim 109, wherein said first level search category
is displayed in said second interface adjacent said second level search categories.

111. The method of Claim 109, wherein a search path is displayed in
said third interface adjacent said third level search categories.

112. The method of Claim 109, wherein a return bar is displayed
adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

113. The method of Claim 112, wherein said return bar comprises a

return button or icon.

114. The method of Claim 113, further comprising:

- (i) receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory; and
- (ii) transmitting a display of said third interface.

115. The method of Claim 112, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

116. The method of Claim 115, further comprising:

- (i) receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and
- (ii) transmitting a display of said web page without said return bar.

117. The method of Claim 109, further comprising receiving said click commands from a mouse.

118. A method for providing a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:

- (i) transmitting a display of a first interface comprising a plurality of first level search categories, wherein each of said first level search categories is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one second level search category;
- (ii) receiving a click command to select a first level search category;
- (iii) transmitting a display of a second interface comprising at least one second level search category corresponding to said first level search category, wherein each second level search category is configured for pointing and clicking to link to at least one third level search category;
- (iv) receiving a click command to select a second level search category;
- (v) transmitting a display of a third interface comprising at least one third level search category corresponding to said second level search category, wherein each third level search category is a uniform research locator configured for pointing and clicking to link to an internet web site;

(vi) receiving a click command to select a third level search category; and

(vii) transmitting a display of a web page of said internet web site corresponding to said third level search category.

119. The method of Claim 118, wherein said first level search category is displayed in said second interface adjacent said second level search categories.

120. The method of Claim 118, wherein a search path is displayed in said third interface adjacent said third level search categories.

121. The method of Claim 118, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

122. The method of Claim 121, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

123. The method of Claim 122, further comprising:

(i) receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory; and

(ii) transmitting a display of said third interface.

124. The method of Claim 121, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

125. The method of Claim 124, further comprising:

(i) receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and

(ii) transmitting a display of said web page without said return bar.

126. The method of Claim 118, further comprising receiving said click commands from a mouse.

127. A method for providing a virtual directory to a desired internet web site relating to a search, comprising:

(i) transmitting a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search categories;

(ii) receiving a click command to select a search category; and

(iii) transmitting a display of a web page of an internet web site corresponding to said search category.

128. The method of Claim 127, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search categories.

129. The method of Claim 128, further comprising:

- (i) receiving a click command to select an alphabet letter;
- (ii) transmitting a display of a group of search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and
- (iii) receiving a click command to select a search category from said group of search categories.

130. The method of Claim 127, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search categories for navigating through said search categories.

131. The method of Claim 130, further comprising receiving a click command to control said scroll bar to locate a search category.

132. The method of Claim 127, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

133. The method of Claim 132, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

134. The method of Claim 133, further comprising:

- (i) receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory; and
- (ii) transmitting a display of said interface.

135. The method of Claim 132, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

136. The method of Claim 135, further comprising:

- (i) receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and
- (ii) transmitting a display of said web page without said return bar.

137. The method of Claim 127, further comprising receiving said click command from a mouse.

138. A method for returning to a virtual directory, comprising:

- (i) transmitting a display of a web page of an internet web site

comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page;

(ii) receiving a click command from said return bar to return to said virtual directory; and

(iii) transmitting a display of an interface from said virtual directory.

139. The method of Claim 138, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

140. The method of Claim 139, further comprising:

(i) receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory; and

(ii) transmitting a display of said interface.

141. The method of Claim 138, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

142. The method of Claim 141, further comprising:

(i) receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and

(ii) transmitting a display of said web page without said return bar.

143. A remote device for receiving web content from a virtual directory host server, comprising:

a storage device; and

a processor connected to the storage device,

the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor;

the processor operative with the program to,

(i) receive a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search categories;

(ii) transmit a click command selecting a search category; and

(iii) receive a display of a web page of an internet web site corresponding to said search category.

144. The remote device of Claim 143, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search categories.

145. The remote device of Claim 144, wherein the processor is further

operative with the program to:

- (i) transmit a click command selecting an alphabet letter;
- (ii) receive a display of a group of search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and
- (iii) transmit a click command selecting a search category selected from said group of search categories.

146. The remote device of Claim 143, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search categories for navigating through said search categories.

147. The remote device of Claim 146, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to transmit a click command controlling said scroll bar to locate a search category.

148. The remote device of Claim 143, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

149. The remote device of Claim 148, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

150. The remote device of Claim 149, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to transmit a click command from said return button or icon to return to a virtual directory.

151. The remote device of Claim 148, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

152. The remote device of Claim 151, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to transmit a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

153. The remote device of Claim 143, further comprising a mouse to point and click through a virtual directory.

154. A remote device for returning to a virtual directory, comprising:
a storage device; and
a processor connected to the storage device,
the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor;
the processor operative with the program to,

- (i) receive a display of a web page of an internet web site

comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page; and

(ii) transmit a click command from said return bar to return to said virtual directory.

155. The remote device of Claim 154, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

156. The remote device of Claim 155, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to transmit a click command from said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory.

157. The remote device of Claim 154, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

158. The remote device of Claim 157, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to transmit a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

159. A virtual directory host server, comprising:

a storage device; and

a processor connected to the storage device,

the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor;

the processor operative with the program to,

(i) transmit a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search categories;

(ii) receive a click command to select a search category; and

(iii) transmit a display of a web page of an internet web site corresponding to said search category.

160. The virtual directory host server of Claim 159, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search categories.

161. The virtual directory host server of Claim 160, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to:

(i) receive a click command selecting an alphabet letter;

(ii) transmit a display of a group of search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and

(iii) receive a click command to select a search category from

said group of search categories.

162. The virtual directory host server of Claim 159, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search categories for navigating through said search categories.

163. The virtual directory host server of Claim 162, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to receive a click command to control said scroll bar to locate a search category.

164. The virtual directory host server of Claim 159, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

165. The virtual directory host server of Claim 164, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

166. The virtual directory host server of Claim 165, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to:

(i) receive a click command from said return button or icon to return to a virtual directory; and

(ii) transmitting a display of said interface.

167. The virtual directory host server of Claim 164, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

168. The virtual directory host server of Claim 167, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to:

(i) receive a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and

(ii) transmit a display of said web page without said return bar.

169. The virtual directory host server of Claim 159, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to receive said click command from a mouse.

170. A virtual directory host server, comprising:

a storage device; and

a processor connected to the storage device,

the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor;

the processor operative with the program to,

(i) transmit a display of a web page of an internet web site

comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page;

(ii) receive a click command from said return bar to return to a virtual directory; and

(iii) transmitting a display of an interface from said virtual directory.

171. The virtual directory host server of Claim 170, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

172. The virtual directory host server of Claim 171, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to:

(i) receive a click command from said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory; and

(ii) transmit a display of said interface.

173. The virtual directory host server of Claim 170, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

174. The virtual directory host server of Claim 173, wherein the processor is further operative with the program to:

(i) receive a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and

(ii) transmit a display of said web page without said return bar.

175. A computer readable medium having computer executable software code stored thereon for receiving web content at a remote device, comprising:

(i) code for receiving a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search categories;

(ii) code for transmitting a click command to select a search category; and

(iii) code for receiving a display of a web page of an internet web site corresponding to said search category.

176. The computer readable medium of Claim 175, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search categories.

177. The computer readable medium of Claim 176, further comprising:

(i) code for transmitting a click command to select an alphabet

letter;

(ii) code for receiving a display of a group of search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and

(iii) code for transmitting a click command to select a search category selected from said group of search categories.

178. The computer readable medium of Claim 175, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search categories for navigating through said search categories.

179. The computer readable medium of Claim 178, further comprising code for transmitting a click command to control said scroll bar to locate a search category.

180. The computer readable medium of Claim 175, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

181. The computer readable medium of Claim 180, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

182. The computer readable medium of Claim 181, further comprising code for transmitting a click command from said return button or icon to return to a virtual directory.

183. The computer readable medium of Claim 180, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

184. The computer readable medium of Claim 183, further comprising code for transmitting a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

185. The computer readable medium of Claim 175, further comprising code for transmitting said click command from a mouse.

186. A computer readable medium having computer executable software code stored thereon for returning to a virtual directory, comprising:

(i) code for receiving a display of a web page of an internet web site comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page; and

(ii) code for transmitting a click command from said return bar to return to said virtual directory.

187. The computer readable medium of Claim 186, wherein said return

bar comprises a return button or icon.

188. The computer readable medium of Claim 187, further comprising code for transmitting a click command from said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory.

189. The computer readable medium of Claim 186, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

190. The computer readable medium of Claim 189, further comprising code for transmitting a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

191. A computer readable medium having computer executable software code stored thereon for presenting, through a virtual directory host server, web content to a remote device, comprising:

- (i) code for transmitting a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search categories;
- (ii) code for receiving a click command to select a search category; and
- (iii) code for transmitting a display of a web page of an internet web site corresponding to said search category.

192. The computer readable medium of Claim 191, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search categories.

193. The computer readable medium of Claim 192, further comprising:

- (i) code for receiving a click command to select an alphabet letter;
- (ii) code for transmitting a display of a group of search categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and
- (iii) code for receiving a click command to select a search category selected from said group of search categories.

194. The computer readable medium of Claim 191, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search categories for navigating through said search categories.

195. The computer readable medium of Claim 194, further comprising

code for receiving a click command to control said scroll bar to locate a search category.

196. The computer readable medium of Claim 191, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said internet web site.

197. The computer readable medium of Claim 196, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

198. The computer readable medium of Claim 197, further comprising code for:

(i) receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to a virtual directory; and

(ii) transmit said interface.

199. The computer readable medium of Claim 196, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

200. The computer readable medium of Claim 199, further comprising code for:

(i) receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and

(ii) transmit said web page without said return bar.

201. The computer readable medium of Claim 191, further comprising code for receiving said click command from a mouse.

202. A computer readable medium having computer executable software code stored thereon for returning to a virtual directory, comprising:

(i) code for transmitting a display of a web page of an internet web site comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page;

(ii) code for receiving a click command from said return bar to return to said virtual directory; and

(iii) code for transmitting an interface from said virtual directory.

203. The computer readable medium of Claim 202, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

204. The computer readable medium of Claim 203, further comprising code for:

(i) receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said virtual directory; and

(ii) transmitting said interface.

205. The computer readable medium of Claim 202, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

206. The computer readable medium of Claim 205, further comprising code for:

(i) receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and

(ii) transmitting said web page without said return bar.

207. A method for searching using a search engine directory, comprising:

(i) receiving a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search engine categories;

(ii) typing a search topic in a text field;

(iii) pointing and clicking on a search engine category; and

(iv) receiving a display of a web page from a search engine web site corresponding to said search topic.

208. The method of Claim 207, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search engine categories.

209. The method of Claim 208, further comprising:

(i) pointing and clicking on an alphabet letter;

(ii) receiving a display of a group of search engine categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and

(iii) pointing and clicking on a search engine category selected from said group of search engine categories.

210. The method of Claim 207, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search engine categories for navigating through said search engine categories.

211. The method of Claim 210, further comprising pointing and clicking on said scroll bar to locate a search engine category.

212. The method of Claim 207, further comprising accessing said search engine directory by pointing and clicking on a search button or icon.

213. The method of Claim 207, wherein a return bar is displayed

adjacent said web page of said search engine web site.

214. The method of Claim 213, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

215. The method of Claim 214, further comprising pointing and clicking on said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory.

216. The method of Claim 213, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

217. The method of Claim 216, further comprising pointing and clicking on said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

218. The method of Claim 207, further comprising using a mouse to point and click through said search engine directory.

219. A method for returning to a search engine directory, comprising:
(i) receiving a display of a web page of a search engine web site comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page; and
(ii) pointing and clicking on said return bar to return to said search engine directory.

220. The method of Claim 219, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

221. The method of Claim 220, further comprising pointing and clicking on said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory.

222. The method of Claim 219, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

223. The method of Claim 222, further comprising pointing and clicking on said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

224. A method for providing a search engine directory, comprising:
(i) transmitting a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search engine categories;
(ii) receiving a search topic from a text field;
(iii) receiving a click command to select a search engine category; and
(iv) transmitting a display of a web page from a search engine web site corresponding to said search topic.

225. The method of Claim 224, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search engine categories.

226. The method of Claim 225, further comprising:

- (i) receiving a click command to select an alphabet letter;
- (ii) transmitting a display of a group of search engine categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and
- (iii) receiving a click command to select a search engine category from said group of search engine categories.

227. The method of Claim 224, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search engine categories for navigating through said search engine categories.

228. The method of Claim 227, further comprising receiving a click command to control said scroll bar to locate a search engine category.

229. The method of Claim 224, further comprising receiving a click command from a search button or icon to access said search engine directory.

230. The method of Claim 224, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said search engine web site.

231. The method of Claim 230, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

232. The method of Claim 231, further comprising:

- (i) receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory; and
- (ii) transmitting said interface from said search engine directory.

233. The method of Claim 230, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

234. The method of Claim 233, further comprising:

- (i) receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and
- (ii) transmitting said web page without said return bar.

235. The method of Claim 224, further comprising receiving said click command from a mouse.

236. A method for returning to a search engine directory, comprising:
- (i) transmitting a display of a web page of a search engine web site comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page; and
 - (ii) receiving a click command from said return bar to return to said search engine directory; and
 - (iii) transmitting an interface from said search engine directory.
237. The method of Claim 226, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.
238. The method of Claim 227, further comprising:
- (i) receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory; and
 - (ii) transmitting said interface from said search engine directory.
239. The method of Claim 226, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon to hide said return bar.
240. The method of Claim 229, further comprising:
- (i) receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and
 - (ii) transmitting said web page without said return bar.
241. A remote device capable of browsing a search engine directory, comprising:
- a storage device; and
 - a processor connected to the storage device, the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor; the processor operative with the program to,
- (i) receive a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search engine categories;
 - (ii) receive a search topic in a text field;
 - (iii) transmit a click command selecting a search engine category; and
 - (iv) receive a display of a web page from a search engine web site corresponding to said search topic.

242. The remote device of Claim 241, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search engine categories.

243. The remote device of Claim 242, wherein the processor is further operative to:

- (i) transmit a click command selecting an alphabet letter;
- (ii) receive a display of a group of search engine categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and
- (iii) transmit a click command selecting a search engine category from said group of search engine categories.

244. The remote device of Claim 241, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search engine categories for navigating through said search engine categories.

245. The remote device of Claim 244, wherein the processor is further operative to transmit a click command controlling said scroll bar to locate a search engine category.

246. The remote device of Claim 241, wherein the processor is further operative to transmit a click command from a search button or icon to access said search engine directory.

247. The remote device of Claim 241, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said search engine web site.

248. The remote device of Claim 247, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

249. The remote device of Claim 248, wherein the processor is further operative to transmit a click command from said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory.

250. The remote device of Claim 247, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

251. The remote device of Claim 250, wherein the processor is further operative to transmit a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

252. The remote device of Claim 241, further comprising a mouse to point and click through said search engine directory.

253. A remote device for returning to a search engine directory, comprising:

a storage device; and
a processor connected to the storage device,
the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor;
the processor operative with the program to,

- (i) receive a display of a web page of a search engine web site comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page; and
- (ii) transmit a click command from said return bar to return to said search engine directory.

254. The remote device of Claim 253, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

255. The remote device of Claim 254, wherein the processor is further operative to transmit a click command from said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory.

256. The remote device of Claim 253, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

257. The method of Claim 256, wherein the processor is further operative to transmit a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

258. A virtual directory host server providing a search engine directory, comprising:

a storage device; and
a processor connected to the storage device,
the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor;
the processor operative with the program to,

- (i) transmit a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search engine categories;
- (ii) receive a search topic from a text field;
- (iii) receive a click command to select a search engine category; and
- (iv) transmit a display of a web page from a search engine web

site corresponding to said search topic.

259. The virtual directory host server of Claim 258, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search engine categories.

260. The virtual directory host server of Claim 259, wherein the processor is further operative to:

- (i) receive a click command to select an alphabet letter;
- (ii) transmit a display of a group of search engine categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and
- (iii) receive a click command to select a search engine category from said group of search engine categories.

261. The virtual directory host server of Claim 258, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search engine categories for navigating through said search engine categories.

262. The virtual directory host server of Claim 261, wherein the processor is further operative to receive a click command to control said scroll bar to locate a search engine category.

263. The virtual directory host server of Claim 258, wherein the processor is further operative to receive a click command from a search button or icon to access said search engine directory.

264. The virtual directory host server of Claim 258, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said search engine web site.

265. The virtual directory host server of Claim 264, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

266. The virtual directory host server of Claim 265, wherein the processor is further operative to:

- (i) receive a click command from said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory; and
- (ii) transmit said interface from said search engine directory.

267. The virtual directory host server of Claim 264, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

268. The virtual directory host server of Claim 267, wherein the

processor is further operative to:

- (i) receive a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and
- (ii) transmit said web page without said return bar.

269. The virtual directory host server of Claim 258, wherein the processor is further operative to receive said click command from a mouse.

270. A virtual directory host server for returning to a search engine directory, comprising:

- a storage device; and
- a processor connected to the storage device,
- the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor;
- the processor operative with the program to,

- (i) transmit a display of a web page of a search engine web site comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page;
- (ii) receive a click command from said return bar to return to said search engine directory; and
- (iii) transmit an interface from said search engine directory.

271. The virtual directory host server of Claim 270, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

272. The virtual directory host server of Claim 271, wherein the processor is further operative to:

- (i) receive a click command from said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory; and
- (ii) transmit said interface from said search engine directory.

273. The virtual directory host server of Claim 270, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

274. The virtual directory host server of Claim 273, wherein the processor is further operative to:

- (i) receive a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and
- (ii) transmit said web page without said return bar.

275. A computer readable medium having computer executable

software code stored thereon for receiving web content at a remote device, comprising:

- (i) code for receiving a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search engine categories;
- (ii) code for transmitting a search topic from a text field;
- (iii) code for transmitting a click command to select a search engine category; and
- (iv) code for receiving a display of a web page from a search engine web site corresponding to said search topic.

276. The computer readable medium of Claim 275, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search engine categories.

277. The computer readable medium of Claim 276, further comprising:

- (i) code for transmitting a click command to select an alphabet letter;
- (ii) code for receiving a display of a group of search engine categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and
- (iii) code for transmitting a click command to select a search engine category from said group of search engine categories.

278. The computer readable medium of Claim 275, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search engine categories for navigating through said search engine categories.

279. The computer readable medium of Claim 278, further comprising code for transmitting a click command to control said scroll bar to locate a search engine category.

280. The computer readable medium of Claim 275, further comprising code for transmitting a click command from a search button or icon to access said search engine directory.

281. The computer readable medium of Claim 275, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said search engine web site.

282. The computer readable medium of Claim 281, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

283. The computer readable medium of Claim 282, further comprising

code for transmitting a click command from said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory.

284. The computer readable medium of Claim 281, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

285. The computer readable medium of Claim 284, further comprising code for transmitting a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

286. The computer readable medium of Claim 275, code for transmitting said click command from a mouse.

287. A computer readable medium having computer executable software code stored thereon for returning to a search engine directory, comprising:

- (i) code for receiving a display of a web page of a search engine web site comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page; and
- (ii) code for transmitting a click command from said return bar to return to said search engine directory.

288. The computer readable medium of Claim 287, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

289. The computer readable medium of Claim 288, further comprising code for transmitting a click command from said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory.

290. The computer readable medium of Claim 287, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

291. The computer readable medium of Claim 290, further comprising code for transmitting a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

292. A computer readable medium having computer executable software code stored thereon for presenting, through a virtual directory host server, web content to a remote device, comprising:

- (i) code for transmitting a display of at least one interface comprising a plurality of search engine categories;
- (ii) code for receiving a search topic from a text field;
- (iii) code for receiving a click command to select a search

engine category; and

(iv) code for transmitting a display of a web page from a search engine web site corresponding to said search topic.

293. The computer readable medium of Claim 292, wherein said interface further comprises alphabet letters A through Z arranged adjacent said search engine categories.

294. The computer readable medium of Claim 293, further comprising:

(i) code for receiving a click command to select an alphabet letter;

(ii) code for transmitting a display of a group of search engine categories corresponding to said alphabet letter; and

(iii) code for receiving a click command to select a search engine category from said group of search engine categories.

295. The computer readable medium of Claim 292, wherein said interface further comprises a scroll bar adjacent said search engine categories for navigating through said search engine categories.

296. The computer readable medium of Claim 295, further comprising code for receiving a click command to control said scroll bar to locate a search engine category.

297. The computer readable medium of Claim 292, further comprising code for receiving a click command from a search button or icon to access said search engine directory.

298. The computer readable medium of Claim 292, wherein a return bar is displayed adjacent said web page of said search engine web site.

299. The computer readable medium of Claim 298, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

300. The computer readable medium of Claim 299, further comprising:

(i) code for receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory; and

(ii) code for transmitting said interface from said search engine directory.

301. The computer readable medium of Claim 298, wherein said return

bar includes a hide button or icon for hiding said return bar.

302. The computer readable medium of Claim 301, further comprising:

- (i) code for receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and
- (ii) code for transmitting said web page without said return bar.

303. The computer readable medium of Claim 292, further comprising code for receiving said click command from a mouse.

304. A computer readable medium having computer executable software code stored thereon for returning to a search engine directory, comprising:

- (i) code for transmitting a display of a web page of a search engine web site comprising a return bar displayed adjacent said web page; and
- (ii) code for receiving a click command from said return bar to return to said search engine directory; and
- (iii) code for transmitting an interface from said search engine directory.

305. The computer readable medium of Claim 304, wherein said return bar comprises a return button or icon.

306. The computer readable medium of Claim 305, further comprising:

- (i) code for receiving a click command from said return button or icon to return to said search engine directory; and
- (ii) code for transmitting said interface from said search engine directory.

307. The computer readable medium of Claim 304, wherein said return bar includes a hide button or icon to hide said return bar.

308. The computer readable medium of Claim 307, further comprising:

- (i) code for receiving a click command from said hide button or icon to hide said return bar; and
- (ii) code for transmitting said web page without said return bar.

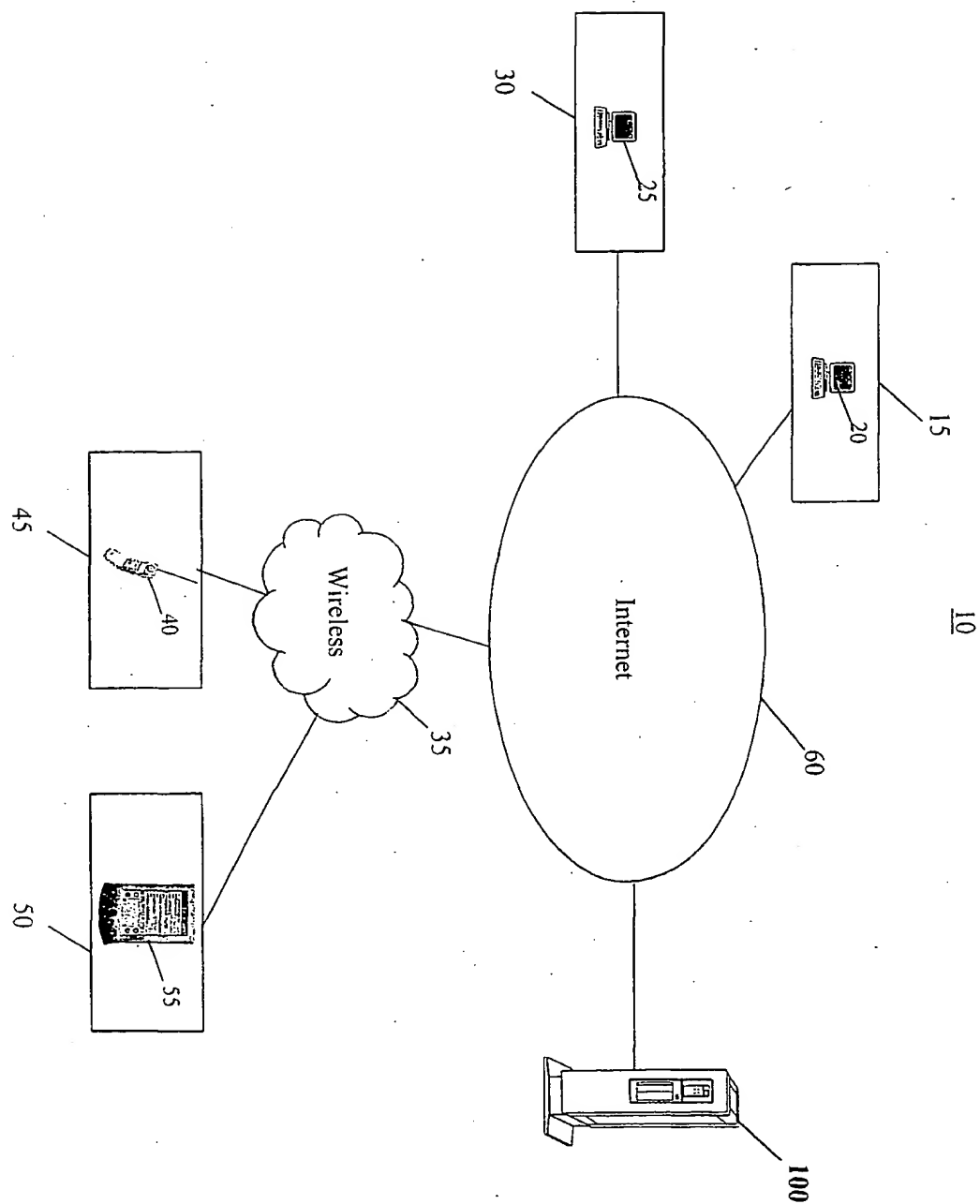


FIG. 1

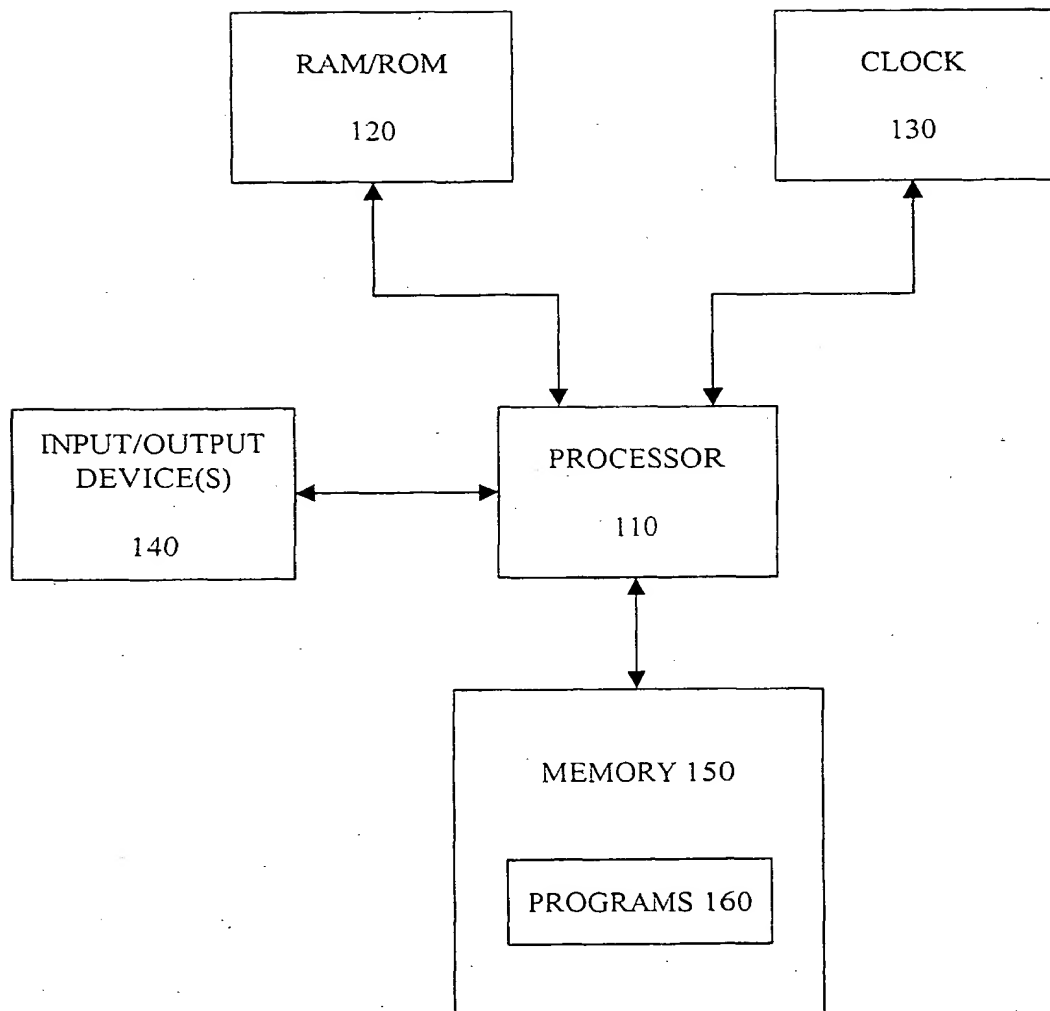
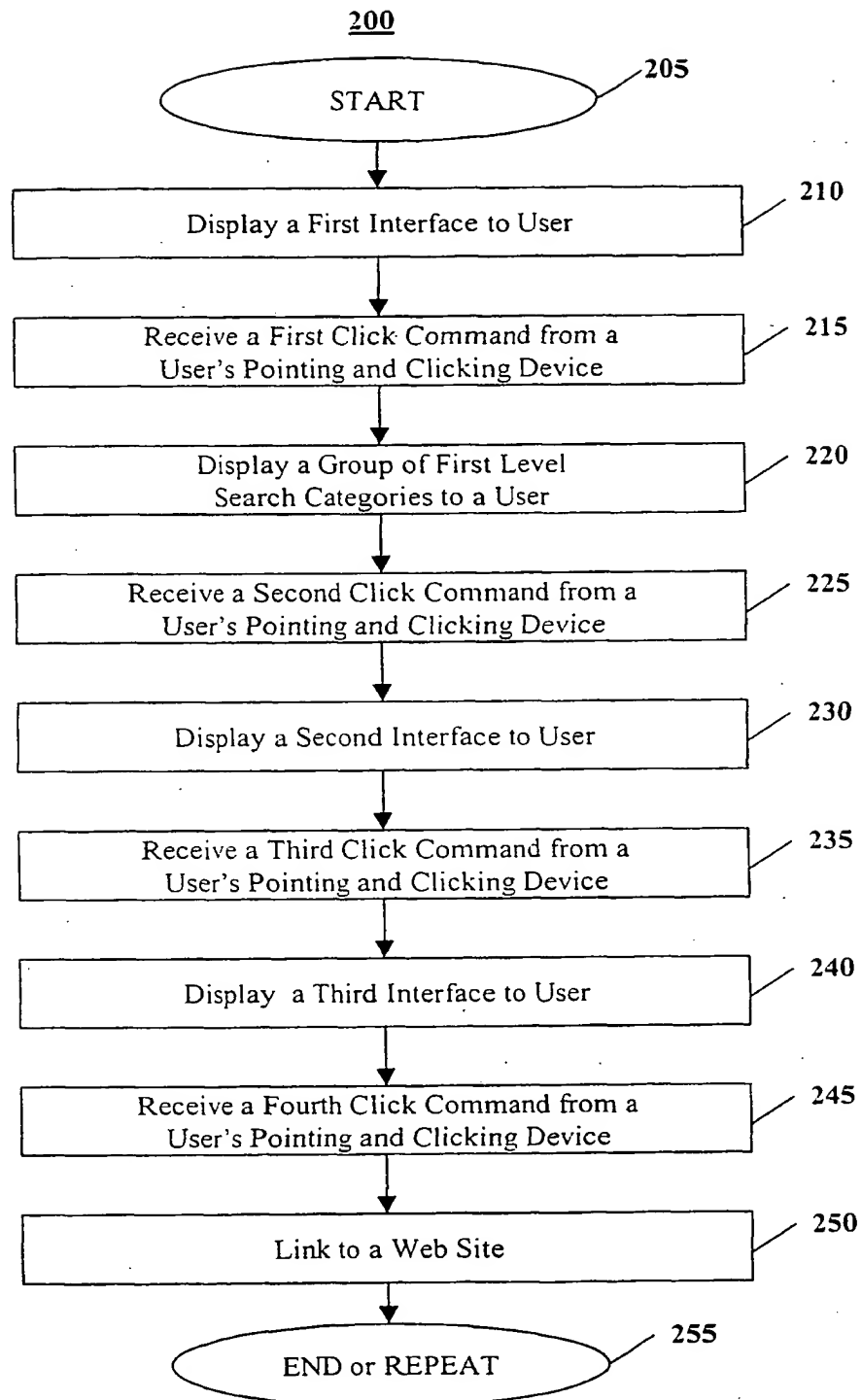
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FIG. 2

**FIG. 3**

300

4/11

310

where the heck is it .com

DIRECTORY TO THE VIRTUAL WORLD

340

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A	B	C	Accounting	Allergies	Art
D	E	F	Actors	Animals	Associations
G	H	I	Addictions	Animation	Astronomy
J	K	L	Adoption	Antiques	Athletes
M	N	O	Advertising	Apparel	Attorneys
P	Q	R	Advise	Appliances	Auctions
S	T	U	Aerospace	Aquariums	Authors
V	W	X	Aircraft	Archeology	Automotive
Y	Z		Airlines	Archery	Aviation
			Alcohol	Architecture	
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FIG. 4

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5/11

410

where the heck is it .com

DIRECTORY TO THE VIRTUAL WORLD

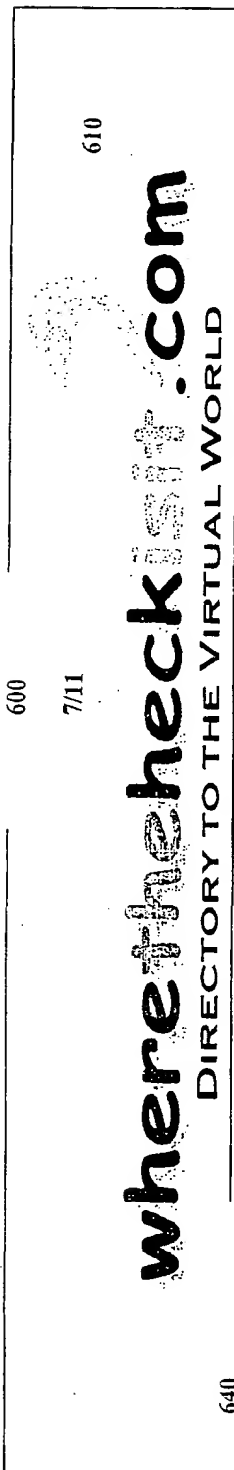
440

A	Babies	Batteries	Board Games
B	Backpacking	Beaches	Bodybuilding
C	Bail Bonds	Bed &	Books
D	Baking	Breakfast	Botany
E	Ballet	Bedding	Bowling
F	Bankruptcy	Beer	Boxing
G	Banks	Beverages	Brand Names
H	Bar Association	Bicycles	Bread
I	Barbeque	Billiards	Bridges
J	Bartending	Biology	Broadcasting
K	Barter Services	Birds	Buses
L	Baseball	Blindness	Business
M	Basketball	Blood Banks	
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FIG. 5

500	510
6/11	
where the heck is it .com	
DIRECTORY TO THE VIRTUAL WORLD	
540	
A B C	Barbeque...
D E F	530 Accessories
G H I	Custom Built
J K L	BBQ Sauces 520
M N O	General Information
P Q R	Manufacturers
S T U	Recipes
V W X	Restaurant Chains
Y Z	Retailers

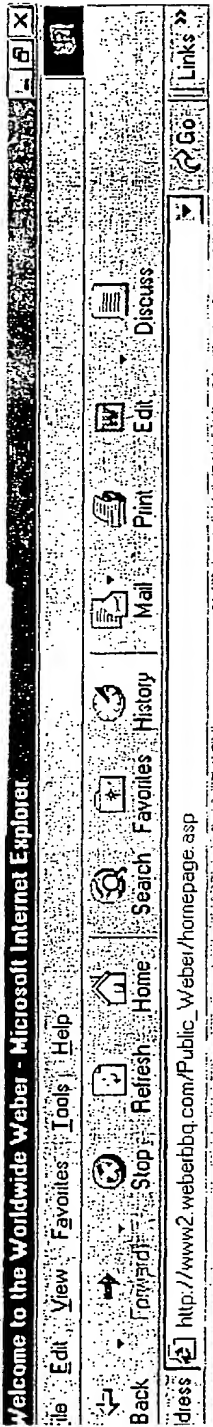
FIG. 6



640

A B C	Barbeque → Manufacturers...	630
D E F	Big Green Egg	Lynx
G H I	Brinkman	Masagrill
J K L	Broil King	Meco
M N O	Broil-Mate	Turbo
P Q R	Capt 'N Cook	TSI
S T U	Coleman	Smoker
V W X	Cook On	Sunbeam
Y Z	DCS	Whales
	Fiesta	Weber
	Flat Rock	Wheel Tough Co.

700



710

GRILLS & ACCESSORIES • SERVICES • THE WEBER COOKBOOK • THE BACKYARD • DEALERS



8/11

720



Click Here to Hide Bar



Click Here to Return to wheretheheckis.it.com

730

FIG. 8

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800

9/11

820

Search

where the heck is it?

2

com

DIRECTORY TO THE VIRTUAL WORLD

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A B C

D E F

G H I

J K L

M N O

P Q R

S T U

V W X

Y Z

Search Engines...

Alta Vista

Ask Jeeves

Direct Hit

Excite

Fast Search

Go

GoTo

Google

HotBot

Looksmart

Lycos

MSN Search

NBCi

Netscape Search

Northern Light

DMOZ

Raging Search

RealNames

WebCrawler

Yahoo

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2-25

FIG. 9

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10/11

Search

where the heck is it? .com

DIRECTORY TO THE VIRTUAL WORLD

Search Engines...

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Ask Jeeves

Direct Hit

Excite

Fast Search

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Google

HotBot

Looksmart

Lycos

MSN Search

NBCi

Netscape Search

Northern Light

DMOZ

Raging Search

RealNames

WebCrawler

Yahoo

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2-26

FIG. 10

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

 International application No.
 PCT/US01/04255

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : G06F 17/00

US CL : 707/6, 10

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 707/6, 10, 3, 4, 5

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

West, search terms: search engine, service provider, advertisement

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5,864,871 A (KITAIN et al.) 26 JANUARY 1999, Abstract, Figure 1	1-308
A	US 5,778,367 A (WESINGER, JR. et al.) 07 JULY 1998, Abstract, Figure 2B	1-308



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	*T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
A document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	*X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
E earlier document published on or after the international filing date	*Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
L document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	*G* document member of the same patent family
O document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
P document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search

11 APRIL 2001

Date of mailing of the international search report

27 APR 2001

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